

## **IS THIS WHAT NEWARK RESIDENTS WANT?**

The City of Newark has passed an ordinance on first reading which changes the format, location and rules for how the City Council meetings will run. No opportunity has been given to the public to discuss and study this proposal and is being voted on at the next Council meeting, May 7, 1997 at 1:00 P.M.

A. The ordinance eliminates the section of the regular meeting known as "citizens hearings". This does not mean that citizens cannot speak. You still can, but only to specific ordinances which are on the Council agenda. It seems you cannot introduce a new topic at the Council meeting. Is that what will happen? Often Newark citizens go to City Council after they have exhausted all other avenues.

B. There will be 2 meetings a month which will be held for "citizens hearings", where you can talk about what you want, and sign up on that day. They will be held during the afternoon at City Hall on the second Wednesday of the month, and on the fourth Wednesday of the month in the evening. You will only get two meetings in your ward per year. One during the day the other at night.

C. These "citizens hearing" meetings will have a minimum of 3 Council members attending, plus a representative from the Mayor's administration. The ordinance says nothing about a guarantee that your Council member will be there (or if they will send their representatives). If only 3 come, **THEY CANNOT VOTE ON ANYTHING.** What good are these meetings if there is no real power to vote changes through?

D. Shouldn't these "in the ward meetings" require the presence of all four at-large Council member, plus the Councilman from your own ward, so that the at-large Council member will understand what is happening in each ward?

E. The "in your ward" meetings are for 3 hours - no matter how many people sign up. Each person is allowed 5 minutes to speak and council members have 5 minutes to respond. If there are lots of people and time runs out, there is no provision for those who do not get to speak during the 3 hours. What happens, do you have to wait six months to speak? Is this being proposed because of the length of current meetings? If so, then perhaps the council should curtail their time to remark?

F. There are many questions about this proposal: Will the "in the ward" meetings be televised? Will all comments be recorded by the City Clerk? Will people from outside the designated ward be able to speak at those meetings, or only those in the ward?

G. Some groups already have regular meetings with their Councilman in their ward. What do residents gain by this proposal?

**H.** Some people believe that this proposal is an effort to "divide and conquer", so that people in the wards never see each other. Others believe it is an effort to get away from "television cameras," which now record the meetings, including the public's comments.

**I.** Reforms changing the format of the City Council meetings are needed. For example: the Essex County Freeholder meetings allow the public to make comments **BEFORE** they do their business. This means people do not have to stay up until midnight to make their comments. The changes the Council has proposed may not be the best system for Newark residents. People need time to look at them, to comment, perhaps to research comparable sized cities and see how they operate. There should be a separate Public Hearing on this topic only.

Newark residents should get this ordinance, study it, and comment on it. It will very much change the nature of how citizens operate in this city. We believe this ordinance should not be passed before there is a specific Public Hearing on it alone.

For copies of the ordinance, or further information, contact SPARK at 465-0603.